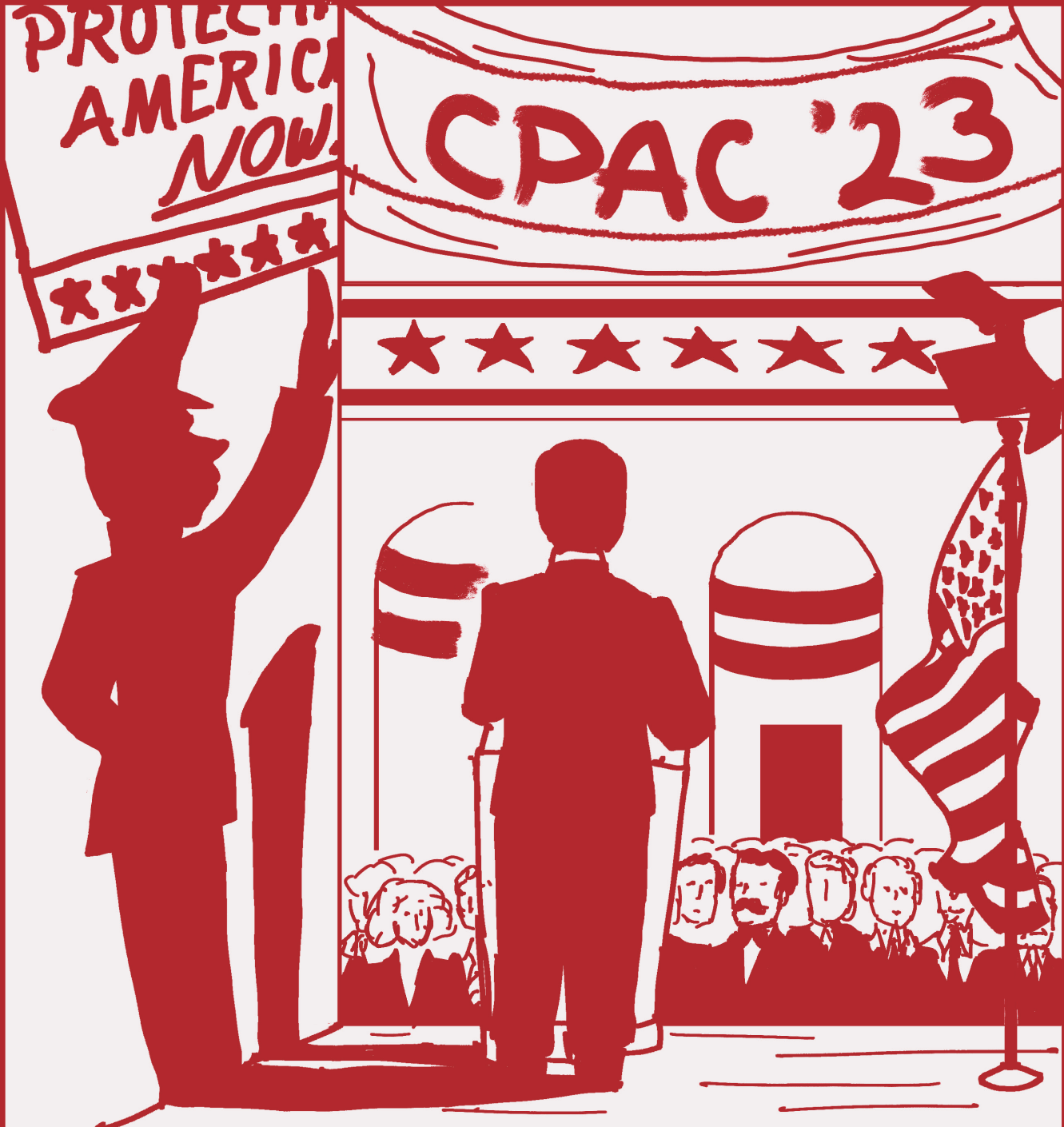




FIREBRAND

ISSUE
#1
March '23



WEIMAR CONDITIONS

and Part One of a Multi-Part Series on

PRESENTABILITY

Student run publication
on progressive politics,
culture, and more.

FIREBRAND

Progressive opinions on
politics, culture, and more.

Issue I

March 2023

Email firebrand-zine@mail.com to submit,
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the change you want to see in the world.

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WEIMAR CONDITIONS

“Weimar conditions, Weimar solutions.”

These were the words chanted by a group of uniformed, flag waving neo-Nazi thugs rallying outside of a drag story hour in Ohio on Saturday, March 11th. This event, along with February’s neo-Nazi demonstration against a show about Jewish lynching victim Leo Frank at Manhattan’s Bernard B. Jacobs theater, are merely a sampling, albeit some of the most potent, of the terrifyingly dramatic rightward shift that is on display across the United States right now.

In the last few years, there have been escalations, of course, including bricks through the windows of leftist bookstores and cafes,

graffiti and vandalism of Jewish cemeteries and historically black churches, and groups of right-wing agitators harassing protestors, but most of these were perpetrated under cover of darkness, where nobody could see them, or behind masks and symbols unfamiliar to people not in the know. However, the Ohio event in particular, with swastika-bearing flags and sieg-heils on full display, is only one of several appearances of white nationalists in the last few months and represents a dramatic escalation that should worry anybody who is paying attention. The white nationalists present represented a few groups, with such names as “Proud Boys,” “Patriot Front,” “Blood Tribe,” and “White Lives Matter,” all of which scream fragility in dif-

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ITIONS

ferent ways. If you haven't heard about it, though, I wouldn't be surprised. Most of the network media and news coverage did not surpass the local level, although something of this caliber should have made national news. The fascists in attendance chanted, saluted, and hurled slurs at attendees, event defenders, and reporters, even forcing a black reporter to leave for his own safety, according to the Akron Beacon Journal's telling of the event. A Republican who led a group of demonstrators claimed surprise at the appearance of white supremacists, and rather than outright denouncing them, proceeds to refer to them as a "distraction" and claims they were more like "factions against an issue" and "not all on one side." Last I checked, however, if someone

is standing next to a Nazi, and not doing anything about it, that makes them no better. But what matters is that they have been increasingly emboldened in the last few years. The thing is, we have seen this all happen before.

For those not knowledgeable on the political landscape of prewar Europe, the Weimar Republic, referenced in the first line of this writing, was the government that ran Germany from after World War One until the Nazis took power. Defined by economic downturn, national embarrassment after Germany's defeat, and tumultuous politics following the abdication of the Kaiser, it was also known for being extremely culturally progressive, at least in the urban centers. It was a renaissance for Germany's LGBTQ community,

with the first modern gay rights movement in history, gay representation in film and media, public outcry against negative portrayals in print and theater, and several clinics and organizations dedicated to studying homosexuality and transness, among other things. The most notable of these was pioneering sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld's Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, containing extensive archives in LGBTQ studies and indispensable research, as well as acting as a safe haven for Berlin's gay community. Hirschfeld's work was responsible for the world's first successful gender reassignment procedure, making Dora Richter the first recipient of male-to-female reassignment surgery. Unfortunately, however, this period wouldn't last.

What was once a progressive, accepting society was swiftly consumed by nationalism, antisemitism, and racism, as Nazis took advantage of tumultuous politics, an uneasy economy and an anxious population. Hirschfeld, being both gay and Jewish, was targeted personally by Nazis as far back as the early twenties, exemplifying the anonymous street violence that characterized the initial years of the Nazi party. Homosexuality at large was attacked, with the LGBTQ community derided as unnatural, an attack on German culture, a sign of societal decay, and, in words familiar to anyone listening to modern American rhetoric, a virus that gay and trans people sought to spread to youths through indoctrination, or, in modern terms, "grooming." In Hitler's own words, "a homosexual will generally seduce a whole host of boys, so that homosexuality really is as infectious and dangerous as the plague," mirroring much of the virulent anti-trans and anti-drag drivel

heard today. When praising raids on gathering places like bars, clubs, and cafes, the Bishop of Münster applauded the actions as eradicating "open propaganda for godlessness and immorality." In 1933, Nazi brownshirts raided the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, burning its archives and murdering Dora Richter. Her death was the same year as the deaths of the first Jewish and disabled victims of the Holocaust. By 1935, 80% of concentration camp prisoners were there on accusations of homosexuality.

Now, we're seeing history repeat itself before our eyes. The right is creating a perception of America being "under attack"- but who exactly is attacking it and how changes on a whim. This, which is a part of the "culture war," "wokeism" (codeword for anybody who is BIPOC, LGBTQ, non-Christian, or generally not white, cis, and straight), and "cultural Marxism" (merely a dubious rebranding of Hitler's 'cultural bolshevism' catchall for anything that didn't fall in line) rhetoric getting flung around by the right, is designed to put Americans on the defensive against anything deemed unfamiliar or that doesn't conform to the cultural hegemony of nuclear family units in neat suburban houses. Along with the comically overused, noncommittal, and vague language of "protecting the children," the trans and drag communities have found themselves in the crosshairs of the right's most overwhelming escalation yet. Ironically, none of the people making a big deal about "the children" are going after churches, where a child is statistically much more likely to be the victim of an assault.

And the on-the-ground fascist thugs terrorizing libraries, parks, bookstores, bars, and cafes are only

getting increasingly emboldened by the legislative blitzkrieg currently happening nationwide. Hundreds of anti-trans, anti-drag, and generally anti-LGBTQ bills are being proposed and passed across the country, mostly targeting drag performers and gender-affirming care and piling on top of the laws targeting women in the aftermath of the fall of *Roe v. Wade*. Republicans are even taking it further in some places, raiding school and university libraries of any books deemed “inappropriate” with brownshirt-like tactics and facilitating militant right-wing takeovers of school and college boards on the local level, with Florida’s governor handpicking officials to vet schools from within. Legislators in Tennessee gutted marriage equality laws, passing a law where marriage clerks “shall not be required to solemnize a marriage.” That means that a clerk can turn down a marriage license for any reason, whether it be an interracial, interfaith, or same-sex couple.

And what are the Democrats doing? Not enough, that’s for sure. The Democratic party needs things like this; this is how they make their money and gain their power. They had ample opportunity to codify *Roe v. Wade*, years in fact. Obama promised that, upon his election, it would be the first thing he’d do if he won, and when he did win, then claimed it wasn’t a priority. Why, you might ask? When *Roe v. Wade* was struck down, the Democratic party made over \$80,000,000 in donations, most of which was immediately funneled towards national-level campaigns instead of state and local organizing, which is where much of the fallout of the overturning as well as the anti-LGBTQ furor is happening. They act as controlled opposition to the Republican party;

nothing meaningful, all performative, as long as it serves to maintain the status quo. I’m sure that readers have heard before that, every time something bad is passed, Democrats always say “we don’t have a majority in the House,” or some other excuse. Somehow, though, that’s hardly ever stopped the Republicans. The Republicans create problems, and the Democrats make a big show of “resisting,” while not actually advancing any meaningful action. How was it that after all the traction from 2020, all the movement, all the marching, all the promises, that police budgets went up, especially in Democrat cities?

The two parties aren’t just symbiotic; in the words of former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere, “The United States is also a one-party state but, with typical American extravagance, they have two of them.” Practically nothing genuinely meaningful has been accomplished by the Democratic party, it has always been on the heels of mass uproar and outcry that their hands were forced to pass progressive policy. While some Democratic lawmakers are seeking to turn their states into safe havens for gender-affirming care and LGBTQ youth and their families, not much has been done on the federal level to stem the tidal wave of legislation nationwide, with the Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton going so far as to demand a list of transgender residents of the state. Democrats will not save us all.

Trump, in his campaign announcement, basically called for trans genocide. Michael Knowles, Daily Wire “media commentator” and fascist, spoke at the Conservative Political Action Coalition, saying “for the good of society ... transgenedrism must be eradicated from public life entirely.” In expected cowardly

fashion, he backtracked, claiming he only wanted the “ideology” eradicated, but what happens when you try to “eradicate” something about a person who doesn’t want to change?

Alongside this, Nazis have made propaganda campaigns throughout the country and in major city centers like New York and Los Angeles, hanging banners and passing out flyers bearing anti-semitic, racist, and anti-LGBTQ phrases and language. Some groups have also resorted to outright domestic terrorism, shooting up power substations and knocking out electricity to thousands in one successful attack, with another targeting Baltimore planned but intercepted. None of this would’ve been thinkable even a decade ago—the increased brazenness should worry anybody. The best course of action? Organize. Establish a strong community and support system of people around you.

Engage in mutual aid. Read theory, and discuss politics with those around you. Keep up to date on struggles across the country and around the world, as solidarity is important. Where things stand right now, not much can be done on a legislative basis, but we must work to protect each other. Amidst the chaos, we’ve inspiringly seen grassroots leftist organizations coming to the defense of drag story hours and other events, often outnumbering, drowning out, and running off groups of fascist thugs while protecting attendees.

This community defense wouldn’t be possible without a strong network of people who have each others’ backs, and are willing to show out when needed. We cannot let fascists walk all over us.

Suggested Readings

Women, Race, and Class

Angela Davis, PhD

An engaging analysis of the intersection of feminism, racism, and class politics in American history from the 18th century on, written by one of the New Left’s most iconic and influential figures. Particularly explores the role of women in the era of slavery, commonplace racism in the suffragette movement, and more, bringing in a variety of topics with ample research behind them.

Reform or Revolution

Rosa Luxemburg

The classic 1899 pamphlet analyzing the question of effectiveness of reform within a system geared against change. A well-known work by one of the turn-of-the-century’s great Marxist theorists, the Polish-German writer, KPD leader, and social activist Rosa Luxemburg, who was later murdered by reactionary forces during the Spartacist Uprising.

Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

Karl Marx

A stunningly relevant breakdown of how popular social and political movements with significant momentum among the people are co-opted and destroyed from the inside by the ruling class, often in the name of property, law, and order. He goes further, declaring that the stigma created around the movement is used against anything remotely progressive; “Every demand of the simplest bourgeois financial reform, of the most ordinary liberalism... is simultaneously castigated as an ‘attempt on society’ and stigmatized as ‘socialism.’”

ADDENDUM

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This addition was written in the wake of Monday's tragic school shooting in Nashville that claimed the lives of six victims, including three children.

Obviously, no time is right for an event of this scale that leads to the unnecessary, untimely deaths of innocent people. However, the timing of this carries broader implications in both the legislative spheres and among the political right as a whole; for those who don't know, the shooter was a transgender man. What has happened here is that, through this tragedy, the right has essentially been served a Reichstag fire on a silver platter. These pundits and politicians don't really care; this is an incident they can exploit to further their legislative onslaught, and the most tasteless of the internet conservative pseudocelebrities have already begun to do so. The fact that we're seeing a rise in anti-trans vitriol not even a day after the shooting is evidence of that.

Rather than giving time to grieve, process, and respond to this horrible incident while also understanding the facts, it's already being turned into a pawn, with outright false information surfacing online, including a fake manifesto created by a far-right online forum. As of right now, the motive is undetermined, but an as-of-yet unreleased manifesto was found, not to mention it has been revealed that the shooter was under the care of a doctor for an unspecified "emotional disorder." It's also reported that, according to officials, there was "some resentment for having to go to that school," with the targeting of a religious institution seeming to potentially implicate religious trauma. Whatever the reason, it doesn't excuse the actions. However,

the circumstances of a very real tragedy shouldn't be warped for the personal gain of overzealous legislators and pundits.

It's the perfect Trojan horse to push even more extreme legislation than what was on the table before, and now, rather than looking like the targeted persecution of a minority group that it is, the right could claim that it's in the "interest of public safety," and that the action is "preventative," despite the vast majority of shooters in reality being cis men. Now, whenever someone protests anti-trans legislation, they'll be hit by people saying "Well, look what they did," as if the trans community is a monolith or an organization. This presents grave potential for an escalation of the already dangerous legislative and social trends we've been seeing.

C. C.

Weimar Conditions - 3.17.2023

Addendum - 3.28.2023

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Presentable

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On Presentability: Introduction

One of the things I would look forward to in my early school days was the series of events, games, and food we would participate and enjoy during Hispanic Heritage Month. Although I'm not Latine, Hispanic, or even well versed in Spanish, it was a time where I felt I could learn anything. My favorite kinds of events were the ones where we would play translation games and win candy (no wonder I have a sweet tooth), but every Cinco de Mayo, my mother would always be excited to dress me up. The only Spanish teacher, Señora Morales, would host a range of festivities, but was sure to fulfill my mother's specific request of notifying her in advance if there would be the cancellation of the 5th of May showcase. It was a showcase, yes, but personally it was a pageant with no prizes. The idea was to have students stand on the auditorium stage with a sash, each given the name of a Latin American country. This didn't happen for long as I only remember being Ecuador, but what I do remember is the mounds of sewing supplies, the texture of PVA glued red glitter on white felt, and especially the flaking black Ampro Pro Style Super-Hold gel that gathered, cemented, and gripped all the thoughts a toddler could possibly have into a high ponytail with a wig attachment and finished with a tiny silver tiara. Moments like those are what I laugh about drawing me away from bursts of colors and frills to just wearing all black with some accent, but as I have gotten wiser I realize moments like these can be summed as: presentability.

Obviously, I cannot speak for everyone, especially other marginalized classes and groups, nor can I speak for other Black cisgender women from the Caribbean diaspora in the northeast United States. However, it would be a disservice if I genuinely feel that the instances and experiences I discuss here are only applicable to me as the overlap of oppression in life does not exist in a vacuum. This is a means to inform sincere allies in some of the struggles that come from class, race, gender, sex, etc... This series, just titled simply under Presentability, will act as an analysis of the "anecdotal" as a legitimate reflection on weaponized turned internalized systemic forms of oppression through the everyday. If you would like to inquire, or send a submission on your experiences, interests, and qualms from navigating social issues and the frustration that could come from that, I encourage you to do so. Otherwise, here is an introduction on presentability.

Presentability is a culmination of the expectations that stems from forms of discrimination such as racism, colorism, textureism, featurism, sexism, classism, and ableism. These also stem from misconceptions of religious ideology, cultural practices, or other traits and interests subjected under colonization. I introduced this piece with a formative memory with my mother. This not to villainize her, or make me feel like a damsel, but to illustrate how the self hatred that presentability creates runs so deeply culturally and within a family.

My mother was born in 1960s Grenada. She is the oldest daughter of an absentee household in a country that would be classified as third world. She grew up poor, and it wasn't until the revolution led by Maurice Bishop that she would have a good chance at education and adequate health. When the United States invaded, it halted the potential that a self sufficient dominantly Black socialist country can have. It set back not only the education and resources available to Grenadians, but it left the island reliant on foreign exports and tourism. By growing up in poverty, it is very likely that people could judge you on your appearance. That is part of the reason why she emphasized the need to have neat clothes, ironed, washed, and properly tucked and buttoned. This, I understood. However, what I would not understand is why people degrade lower income people for spending money on personal adornments, such as sneakers or having the latest technology.

This is something that I especially see directed towards African Americans. Personally, I am a very simple person, I don't really care about the statistics of the clothes that I'm wearing. I like to make them look like me and represent my personality, but primarily I see them as utilitarian. I only really get new clothes if I have to. However, that does not mean I would shame somebody for trying to have a sense of self-control and dignity in poverty. Maybe this is a bias that I need to address myself, but I find that my intuition tends to be correct. The more I see somebody with designer shoes, smarter technology, the latest accessories, designer clothes, so on and so on, the more that I see how characterizing poverty and presentability intersect. Clothes seemed to last longer than food, than utilities, than housing payments, and unfortunately more than housing itself.

If the objects made from exploitative labor can imply that someone has a semblance of

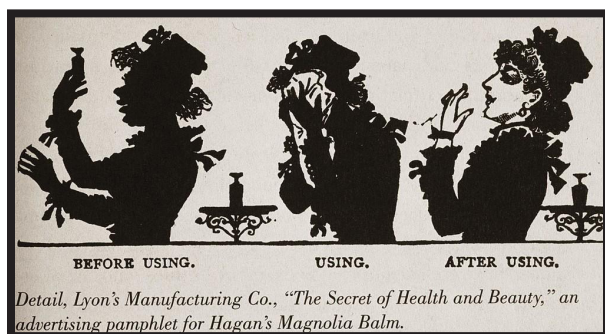
togetherness, that they can have an aesthetic commonality with the wealthy influencers and celebrities in the mainstream, and that they will not have the stereotypical look of homelessness or housing insecurity despite the stress of housing stability, that they too can know the life of luxury. It is also especially sinister that fast fashion takes advantage of the poor and working class desire for classist presentability. Instead of corporations, real estate predators, and the ravenous billionaires who profit off of necessity shouldering the responsibility of the pollution made from creating impermanent consumables, from turning the individual into a renewable commodity, their predatory and intentional role under capitalism renders the average person unable to make an ethical choice.

Someone who doesn't make enough to eat a healthy diet is forced to be less inclined to buy a sustainable, or even greenwashed at times, coat made from organic textiles. Someone who knows about the awful quality of fast fashion items is able to recognize the industry as environmentally harmful, but also may not be able to purchase a high quality \$250 wool coat for the winter when fast fashion company #6 sells acrylic coats for \$35. It's snowing in January, the gas bill is \$225. If the payment is late, suddenly it's an extra \$150. Suddenly that sweatshop coat doesn't sound too bad anymore.

On the topic of class, it would also be helpful to touch a little bit on work. What I am not going to suggest is that people pull themselves up by the bootstraps, because there's a chance that the people wearing boots are already working as hard as they can, especially in tropics such as the Caribbean. When people here in the United States want to go on vacation, generally, people think of the Caribbean. I don't blame them! The Caribbean is a beautiful place. They'll be able to enjoy the sweetest fruits they will ever have in their life, the sea moss gently kissing their skin as the sea crashes on their feet, and are able to rest their weary

heads under tree shade in the glorious sun. The same sun that for over 200 years gilded the complexion of African slaves tolling for commodities such as spices and sugar. Just like same sun that beams on the heads of those vacationing from the first world is shining down on the descendants of slaves who are indentured to a falsified debt incurred to them by their colonial oppressors, the same succulent fruits that they harvest and are unable to sell due to tourist superstition are the same fruits sold overseas cheaper. Grown in Jamaica, packaged in Argentina. Sold exclusively to the USA.

This is why, for some people, having a darker skin complexion functions similarly to worn clothes or other low economic signifiers. It is the reason why your tia tells you not to stay in the sun for



too long. "It will ruin your complexion." During the days of chattel slavery where the caste system gave way to the classification of mulattos and the one drop rule, if people were born from enslaved - enslaver relations and rapes, there is an increased likelihood of better treatment if the children could pass as white. Or at least, white adjacent. Instead of working in the harsh fields, those of lighter complexion were able to stay inside doing housework, maybe even get an education. And while at that, some sort of social mobility, especially as it relates to capital.

For those who aren't trained in critical thinking, this adherence to white supremacist values and ideas is what keeps

those who exist outside of the Western canon suppressed. Superficially, someone without this awareness would be quick to believe that somehow a genetic relation to European features is an indicator of European superiority. An oversight as eugenics. Whatever happens to the raped and slaved women who don't have children to bear for themselves (If they want to) and is strong and it is capable of producing

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breast milk? The same women who are currently villainized as bad mothers in the caricature of teen pregnancy, wedlock, and or single motherhood to multiple fathers are the same women who come from an even longer line of women who wet nursed and fed the children of their enslavers.

In future editions, Presentability as a series will expand on topic correlating to race, gender, and class. This will also allow me to address any biases I currently have or have had to address. If I want to help make a more honest and equitable society, I must not only look outward to be aware of harmful, careless, or even ignorant practices from those around me, but I need to do whatever I can to make sure I am not being ignorant myself, because as I said earlier with my own mother, and as I know from my own experiences, the perceptions and expectations that we have for conformity, especially from historically oppressed groups, often carry generational beliefs that diminishes an aspect of their identity for social elevation or protection.

How do we move on from that? How do we move forward with deeply rooted traumas and biases when the world that we exist in now is vastly different from that of 100 years ago, vastly different from an age which those who are alive today have witnessed? This was an introduction to presentability.

O.S.

On Presentability: An Introduction -
3.17.2023

Wanna write to Firebrand?

Email firebrand-zine@mail.com to submit,
to ask, anything else that demands
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